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An Intelligence Memorandum

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Information available as of 22 April 1982 has been used in the preparation of this report.

This memorandum was prepared by , Office of Soviet Analysis. It was coordinated with the Arms Control Intelligence Staff and the National Intelligence Council. Comments and queries are welcome and may be directed to

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Are the Soviets Interested in Deep Reductions in Strategic Forces?

Summary

Soviet commentaries about possible future agreement on "deep cuts" in the level of US and Soviet strategic arms have become more frequent during the past year. In part, at least, they are intended to respond to US criticism that the ceilings negotiated in SALT II are relatively high and to demonstrate interest in the Strategic Arms Reduction Talks (START)

Moscow has claimed, however, that its willingness to negotiate deep cuts would depend on satisfactory treatment of Soviet concerns about US "forward-based systems," the prospective deployment of US ground- and sea-launched cruise missiles, and the nuclear forces of the United Kingdom, France, and China. Even if these matters were resolved—and the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) talks rather than START could prove to be the forum—it is doubtful that the Soviets would accept cuts much below 2,000 intercontinental delivery vehicles

Are the Soviets Interested in Deep Reductions in Strategic Forces?

On 1 December 1981, in a [ ] reply to President Reagan's November letter on US arms control proposals, Soviet President Brezhnev asserted that the USSR is in favor of reductions in strategic arms but claimed that SALT II already provides for "very substantial" cuts. Further reductions, he stated, must take into account "all factors that determine the strategic situation," as well as the principle of equality and equal security

This qualification has often been expressed in the past by Soviet spokesmen. It typically means from the Soviets' point of view that a START and/or INF agreement must deal with three particular Soviet concerns. These are US "forward-based" systems (FBS), potential US cruise missile deployment, and third-country nuclear forces.

Soviet Statements in 1981-82

Last year, Moscow's view of deep reductions was frequently explained in Soviet journals and press accounts. Most of the commentaries were skeptical of US intentions and emphasized the following points:

- Moscow had historically championed the idea of deep cuts and had gone further than Washington in advocating the elimination of all nuclear weapons and stockpiles.
- Deep cuts could be negotiated only according to the principle of equality and equal security and would require a resolution of the Soviet concerns cited above.
- The Soviets doubted the seriousness of US proposals.

Despite such reservations, Moscow continued to signal its interest in deep cuts in discussions held with Western officials in various arms control forums. In August 1981 [ ] that the Soviets might well look with favor at the idea of reductions below the levels in the unratified SALT II Treaty [ ] claimed that when President Carter had proposed the lower levels in 1977, the timing had been wrong and the US handling of the proposal had been clumsy. He indicated that if the possibility of such reductions were raised again, Moscow would be more receptive

In November 1981 a Soviet adviser to the SALT Standing Consultative Commission (SCC) told a US counterpart that the USSR was prepared for deep reductions in intercontinental delivery vehicles. The proof of this attitude, he said, was Moscow's agreement to the SALT II Treaty. He doubted US readiness for such reductions

To further fan Washington's interest in resuming strategic arms talks, Brezhnev addressed another major US concern—verification—in November. In an interview published by *Der Spiegel*, he indicated that "given confidence" the two nations could negotiate some type of cooperative measures to augment national technical means of verification.

In January 1982 [redacted] indicated to [redacted] that the Soviets were willing to explore the idea of deep cuts. He asked rhetorically what had happened to this idea and whether it had faded away. He added that the USSR would regard any such US proposal favorably

Brezhnev again stressed the importance of strategic arms talks in March 1982 in a speech to the Soviet Trade Union Congress. His remarks can be viewed as a mixture of inducements and threats, apparently aimed at encouraging the arms control dialogue, preserving the "positive elements" of the SALT II Treaty, and expressing growing impatience with what Moscow regards as Washington's foot-dragging on START. Brezhnev's letters to the Australian and Japanese "peace" groups in February and March also reflect some of these considerations.

Why the Apparent Interest Now?

Brezhnev's Trade Union Congress speech was particularly noteworthy because of the sense of urgency in his remarks on strategic arms talks. Without an agreement soon, he warned, both sides could develop new types of weapons of mass destruction that might undermine the current opportunities for limitation, reduction, and verification.

The Soviet leaders believe that their arms control policy since the late 1960s has brought them both military and political gains, particularly in restraining US defense programs. In the 1980s, however—since the invasion of Afghanistan and the more recent involvement in Polish affairs—they have recognized that a deep-seated and unfavorable shift has occurred in US attitudes toward the USSR and national security policy. They see an assertive US administration capitalizing on this shift and pursuing defense programs bent on reversing the strategic gains the Soviets have made over the past decade.

A new arms control agreement would be valuable, in Moscow's view, because it would offer an opportunity to regulate US programs and possibly to stagnate competition in areas where the United States might have a technological advantage—cruise missiles, antiballistic missiles, and space weaponry. Regulating or slowing US programs would facilitate Soviet planning, reduce weapons costs, and, in significant areas, minimize the possibility of technological surprise. These results translate directly into military and military-industrial benefits.

The Soviets believe a new strategic arms agreement—or even the prospect of one—would also yield political and economic benefits. They might anticipate that a renewed strategic arms dialogue could create a more favorable political climate, which could arrest the trend toward Western sanctions that began with their invasion of Afghanistan and was broadened by the declaration of martial law in Poland. Moreover, Moscow has long believed that strategic arms negotiations contribute to warmer Soviet-US ties generally, which in turn facilitate Soviet access to Western credits, goods, and technology, and thus mitigate economic problems at home and in Eastern Europe. As became clear in the 1970s, the Soviets expect this favorable arrangement to continue regardless of their activities in the Third World. Because its economic problems are becoming serious, Moscow probably attaches as much importance to the political and economic benefits that might result from renewal of a dialogue as it does to any limitations of US strategic programs that might eventually be negotiated.

Moscow's Conditions for Serious Negotiations

The Soviets have indicated they would be amenable to discussing deep cuts in START if the INF talks or START addressed their concerns about US FBS and third-country nuclear forces. They are more interested in those concerns than in the particular forum, but currently—probably because the INF talks are under way and START is not—they are insisting that these forces should be negotiated in the INF framework. They claim, moreover, that British and French nuclear forces are an integral part of an existing European balance in "medium-range" forces

Some of these arguments on US FBS and third-country nuclear forces hark back to positions the Soviets first established during the SALT I negotiations. At that time they began espousing their view of equality and equal security, arguing that an agreement must consider not only US intercontinental systems, but also any Western systems that could strike the USSR

As a result, the Soviets see US deployment of thousands of long-range cruise missiles worldwide as incompatible with any agreement calling for deep reductions in intercontinental systems. They indicated [redacted] that they would not cut back their strategic delivery vehicles to the 2,250 level in the SALT II Treaty without an extension of the Treaty's Protocol (which eventually expired at the end of 1981) or a resolution of such Protocol issues as the deployment of ground- and sea-launched cruise missiles. More recently, an article in the 12 January 1982 issue of *Krasnaya Zvezda* stated:

> *There should be no doubt that even an incomplete realization of US plans for the deployment of cruise missiles not covered by an agreement would create objective difficulties in the path of a substantial reduction in strategic armaments.*

In his speech at the Trade Union Congress, Brezhnev underscored Soviet concern about such US plans by proposing a ban on sea- or ground-launched cruise missile deployment pending the resumption of strategic arms talks. His proposal was essentially a reiteration of a provision governing these types of cruise missiles in the Protocol, which the Soviets still believe is an integral part of the SALT II Treaty

How Much Might Moscow Agree To Reduce?

In 1979, along with the SALT II Treaty, a joint statement for SALT III was negotiated, which called for "significant and substantial reductions" in strategic arms. The Soviets have never specifically spelled out what they would consider such reductions to be. During the SALT II negotiations, they rejected a US attempt to set a goal for SALT III limiting strategic delivery vehicles to 1,800 to 2,000, claiming that such a proposal would predetermine future negotiations. They stated, however, that SALT III cuts should be "significant" and not "token."

The Soviets have shown some flexibility in negotiating lower total numbers for intercontinental delivery vehicles. They rejected cuts to 2,000 delivery vehicles, which the United States proposed in March 1977 during SALT II discussions, but they did accept a level of 2,250 in April 1978. This figure is 150 less than the limit originally negotiated at Vladivostok in 1974 and about 250 less than their current inventory. The Soviets may wish to express interest now in deep reductions in intercontinental forces to parallel their position on radically reducing INF in the Geneva negotiations

We do not believe the Soviets will accept cuts much below 2,000 intercontinental delivery vehicles. They probably would reject any US proposals to substitute other units of accounting (throw weight or number of warheads, for example) for launchers if the substitution would reduce their force well below that number of delivery vehicles. Deep reductions below 2,000 would disrupt the Soviets' ongoing efforts to modernize their ICBM, SLBM, and bomber forces. With a ceiling of about 2,000, however, they could retain all of their operational MIRVed systems (the SS-17, SS-18, and SS-19 ICBMs, and the SS-N-18 SLBM) and retire their unMIRVed, less accurate missiles (such as the SS-11, SS-13, SS-N-5, and SS-N-6). The Soviets' present plans probably call for a MIRVed missile force at or near the SALT II ceiling of 1,200 launchers for such missiles. They will reach this level with their current MIRVed systems and the SS-NX-20 SLBM when it is deployed in the mid-1980s.

The Soviets may also want to preserve the option of deploying a heavy bomber with air-launched cruise missiles (ALCMs). Under the SALT II ceiling of 1,320 for MIRVed missile launchers and ALCM-equipped heavy bombers together, they would be able to deploy 120 such bombers without reducing their MIRVed missile launcher total below 1,200.

In addition to this force of MIRVed missiles and ALCM carriers, the Soviets would want to retain at least several hundred single-RV ICBMs and SLBMs for such targets as enemy launch control centers and bomber bases.

The Soviets may also have plans to replace the SS-N-8 on D-class SSBNs with another single-RV SLBM.

If the Soviets accepted an agreement to reduce the number of their delivery vehicles to 2,000, this would not only preserve their modernization options, it would compel the United States to cut its force by about 10 percent (the SALT II Treaty would not have required any US reductions). Such an agreement would provide Moscow with political benefits as well. It could advertise its willingness to agree to reductions below SALT II levels as evidence of good faith and of interest in sustaining the strategic arms limitation process.

The Soviets probably expect the United States to propose limits on warheads and refire missiles in any agreement calling for deep reductions. They are aware of the US view that without such limits the Soviets could circumvent reductions by installing more warheads on existing missiles or deploying additional missiles. They may try to convince Washington that their willingness to accept such limits is directly linked with US forbearance in seeking drastic revisions to the basic framework of the SALT II Treaty.

Although Moscow may be receptive to cuts in overall delivery vehicles below SALT II levels, it will probably not agree to large cuts in its heavy ICBM force, such as those proposed by the Carter administration in March 1977. Its force of 308 launchers for the SS-18 is now being upgraded with the Mod 4, which carries 10 MIRVs [redacted] The Soviets viewed the US proposal on heavy ICBMs as one-sided and probably would reject another attempt to severely limit this force. They might agree to some reduction, however, if the United States were prepared to make concessions on future MX, Trident II, or cruise missile deployment